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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 030534

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STATE FOR EAP/CM AND DRL
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TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI CH
SUBJECT: Shenzhen Independent "Candidates" Zou Tao and
Jiang Shan Face Stiffening Police Pressure

REF: A) Guangzhou 17422; B) Guangzhou 14013

¶1. (U) Classified by Consul General Robert X Goldberg.
Reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶2. (C) A PSB-led effort to crackdown on dissidents appears to have thwarted efforts by democracy activists to run as candidates in upcoming Shenzhen elections. Shenzhen-based activists Zou Tao and Jiang Shan have been unable to register even as voters, much less for the independent candidacy they sought. Government officials told them directly to "give up" their election dreams. Zou and his activist friends face continued harassment including detention, questioning, and at times beatings. End summary.

¶3. (C) On August 31, Poloff met with the Shenzhen-based activist Zou Tao to discuss his situation and latest goals. Zou, who appeared more nervous and strained since the previous meeting, said his rights have been steadily limited since Poloff last met with him on June 2 (Ref A). More recently, on September 22, Zou called Poloff that his activist friend, Jiang Shan, had been roughly treated and arrested by Shenzhen police. Zou later said Jiang was safe at his home and police had temporarily detained him for questioning.

Harassment

¶4. (C) Zou originally gained international attention (including detention by Shenzhen police) with a petition he openly posted on the Internet, asking Chinese citizens to boycott China's overpriced housing market for the next three years. In July and August Zou said he was under increasingly more difficult surveillance. His email password is frequently blocked because the password has been changed by someone else. On August 30, the day before meeting Poloff, Zou said one of his best friends (whom he did not want to name) was attacked outside of Shenzhen. Zou brought pictures to the meeting of his friend lying in a hospital bed. According to Zou, who was not present at the event, a group of thugs jumped out of a van and used clubs and knives to assault the friend. The thugs did not take any money but left the friend bleeding from multiple minor stab wounds and a missing finger.

¶ 15. (C) Zou said he weekly receives dozens of death threat calls and text messages. Some of the callers say there is a USD 1 million bounty for killing Zou. Every week Zou is required to meet and report to the Shenzhen Public Security Bureau (PSB). After meeting with Poloff in June, Zou was immediately questioned about the content of the meeting. Although the PSB has repeatedly told Zou to never meet with foreign press, Zou has ignored these threats. This September Zou's picture appeared in articles in the South China Morning Post (SCMP) and Phoenix News Group magazine. Zou said all his family members in his home province of Hunan have been investigated by the PSB. The PSB have paid particular attention to Zou's ex-wife, whom the PSB went to great lengths to track down. If friends try to meet with Zou, they are soon followed as well and told that they will also receive trouble if they meet with him.

¶ 16. (C) In June, Zou told Poloff his dream was to work for an NGO in Hong Kong. When Zou later went to the passport office to issue a foreign passport, however, he was told he was barred from leaving the country. Subsequently the PSB has told him he cannot even leave Shenzhen. Zou also claims he has been blacklisted by the government and cannot get work. Zou says the goal of the government is "to make him disappear."

Support and Outside Contacts

¶ 17. (C) Many outsiders look to Zou as a hero and symbol of political activism in China. Zou showed Poloff messages comparing him with Sun Yat-sen, Ghandi and Zhang Zhixin (a young woman who was tortured and executed during the Cultural Revolution). Messages were as diverse as a peasant in Ningxia Autonomous Region to a graduate student at a prominent Beijing university. Zou said he had

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received advice from other lawyers such as Gao Zhisheng, Guo Feixiong, and Tang Jingling (Tang told Poloff he has personally visited Zou) and recently help write an article for the blind activist, Chen Guangcheng.

Dashed Election Hopes

¶ 18. (C) Zou said there is a group of activists in Shenzhen who meet about once a month. The main goal of the group has been to campaign for either Zou Tao or his activist friend, Jiang Shan, as an independent representative to the National People's Congress. (Note: In April, Guo Feixiong also told Poloff that the main goal of the "Rights Protection Movement" would be to focus on democratic election rights on the village, county and township level. Ref B). In order to run as a candidate, however, Zou and Jiang must first register as a voter. During the meeting with Poloff, Zou was concerned of his chances for election since he had "no citizen rights" and no ability to do his political activities. He complained that authorities were trying to bar him of the right to vote and the right to be elected. Zou showed Poloff a quotation from a Chinese-language newspaper that published a story about Zou Tao. The article quoted a Chinese saying that indicated Zou had reached his "political dead-end."

¶ 19. (U) Zou's concerns about his election rights later came true. On September 9, the South China Morning Post reported that Jiang had his voter registration application denied, while Zou was not provided an application, on the excuse that the forms "were still being printed." As a result, neither activist is eligible to run as a candidate. The article also reported that Zou was interrogated by PSB authorities for two hours about his election intentions and was told to "give up" any election dreams. Additionally, the article also stated Shenzhen police tore down election posters made by Jiang Shan and noted most voters in

Shenzhen knew nothing about the election because of a media blackout.

Comment

¶110. (C) These actions by the PSB appear to be part of a considerate effort to intimidate activists and to prevent them from gaining either a media voice or a public voice through elections. We are not aware of what event caused the PSB to take these actions, but it is clear that South China is in the midst of a serious crackdown on activists who are major players in the region. Judging by Guo Feixiong's statements in April that the "Rights Protection Movement" would shift its focus to local-level democratic elections, we can speculate that the PSB actions are being taken in an effort prevent activists from participating in fall elections.

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